

## Psychological and Physiological Origins of Racism and Other Social Discrimination

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IN his book "White Over Black," the historian Winthrop Jordan, has documented much of the early developmental course and some of the dynamics of American racism. He laboriously gathered and creatively organized his data so that they show, graphically and in considerable detail, that European whites, upon encountering blacks, imputed to the blacks all the group-threatening characteristics which the whites were attempting to renounce and repress in themselves. By the psychological mechanism of projection they purged and purified their image of themselves as they dumped their undesirable characteristics upon their image of blacks, and thereby created a pro-white, anti-black paranoia. Role relationships, philosophies, economies, politics, education, and all other aspects of culture and social structure were then altered to support and to conform to these false beliefs which aggrandized whites and denigrated blacks.

Shakespeare beautifully reflected these 17th century social dynamics in the play "Othello" when he depicted the crafty white Iago systematically undermining and destroying the dignity, the manhood, the confidence, the initiative, the self-esteem, the capacity for love and trust, and eventually the life of the black Othello.

In Jordan's book, "American Attitudes Toward The Negro," attention is given only to white American attitudes toward the Negro. For instance, Negro American attitudes and Indian American attitudes toward the Negro are omitted. The impression is presented that "American" is synonymous with white.

The magnitude, pervasiveness, and destructiveness of racism in America have given rise to many questions concerning its nature and origin.

Winthrop Jordan's careful study of white American and English attitudes toward blacks prior to 1812 clearly delineates their paranoid nature. His material discloses a sequence of at least seven stages, 1) readiness to use the psychological mechanism of projection at the time of initial white-black encounters; 2) whites deny in themselves and falsely impute to blacks a monopoly on those human characteristics which they do not wish to acknowledge in themselves; 3) elaboration, rationalization, and justification of the false beliefs; 4) alteration of reality to fit the false beliefs; 5) transmission of the false beliefs and the contrived reality along with and as part of other elements of culture; 6) ongoing dynamic conflict within individuals and between them over the morality or adaptive value of the beliefs or the realities created in their image; and 7) scapegoating with sacrifice of a part to save the main body of paranoid beliefs, paranoid behavior, and paranoid social order. (Eliminating slave trade took the heat off opposition to slavery. Emancipation of slaves was followed by continuing inhumane treatment of blacks by whites.)

Frank Snowden's study of white-black relationships in Italy revealed a different pattern. Notable is the fact that the earliest blacks encountered by the English had simple clothing and tribal cultures, whereas the Ethiopians encountered by Italians had complex clothing and culture with an aristocracy and large servant class not unlike Italy's. Italians consequently perceived blacks more as equals than did the English although repression of blacks developed in both countries.

It is my belief that common physiological patterns in human beings account for the ubiquitous nature of such psychological and social repression, for the forms of repression developed, and the general dynamics with which it functions.

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## THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING FALSE BELIEFS

There are normal, non-pathological characteristics in human individuals and in human groups which cause humans to reject enlightened understanding and humane behavior with one another. All the data I have been able to observe in 25 years of psychiatric practice and in 15 years study of social issues have led me to the conclusions that: 1) quite normally, all people function with non-pathological paranoid patterns of which they are completely unaware, and 2) that all of us generally ignore, forget, or discount hypotheses or data which suggest we are irrational and primitive, or which undermine our self-esteem or narcissism. As Dr. Kenneth Clark noted in comments upon the Kerner Commission Report on Civil Disturbances, repeatedly, we re-discover, and re-arrive at the same conclusions, only to re-forget, re-ignore, and re-discount them.

Human beings have a long history of courageous attempts to correct these basic defects in their beliefs which lead to dehumanization, repression, exploitation, and destruction of one another. They strive unsuccessfully to control or eliminate these destructive effects by legislative, law enforcement, judiciary, and executive activity, but false beliefs corrupt the people in each of these areas. They struggle with their philosophies, religions, and psychologies to understand the defects and to offer corrective guidelines, but the defects so pervade them that the advocate of any one doctrine relates as a "racist" toward those advocating other doctrines.

While the specific features of beliefs are determined by the culture of the group in which one lives, the general principles on which they are based are so universal as to be considered part of the nature of man.

The general principle of spacial relationship, with sub-divisions covering identification, hierarchy, competition, and distance, defines that our beliefs aggrandize what is inside, or high, or ahead, or near, while we denigrate what is outside, or low, or behind, or distant.

The general principle of accessibility defines that our beliefs aggrandize what is free, or open, or known, while we denigrate what is restricted, hidden, or unknown.

The general principle of appearance, with sub-divisions covering color, size, form, consistency,

etc. define that our beliefs aggrandize what is white, or large, or formed, or firm while we denigrate what is black, or small, or unformed, or soft.

Where principles are in conflict, the dominant one prevails. An object with which one identifies, but which is distant, is aggrandized and favored since the identification principle supersedes the distance principle (an American in a distant land continues to be aggrandized and favored though distant). An object or person perceived as higher and also distant will be aggrandized because the hierarchy principle takes precedence over the distance principle. In comparative strength, the competitive principle ranks with the hierarchy principle.

Although humans show considerable variation in their capacities to shift attachments from one idea, object, or territory to another, some attachments to ideas and culture in humans is comparable to the strong attachments to territory found in certain animals. These strong attachments are generally linked intimately to the identity, sense of integrity, emotions, and physiology of each individual.

In fact, Konrad Lorenz and other zoologists have identified several of these principles in the behavior of many birds, fish, and mammals they have studied. Preferences for or attachments to particular places, status, or mates are classified by naturalists as the imperatives of territory, of dominance, and of sex.

Insofar as the behavior of an individual is programmed by or responsive to some social group (a family, a social class, an institution, a sub-culture, or a culture) we may refer to the behavior as group-related. In fact, a group is made up of persons who have had reinforcement or inhibition of certain common patterns of thinking and behavior, and who affiliate with one another with a considerable mutual identification.

The implication that psychological mechanisms reinforced in individuals can result in the sharing of false beliefs by millions invites some discussion of the physiological mechanisms by which this comes about.

Every universally operative principle of behavior must be anchored in anatomical and physiological elements which are universal. What in the anatomical and physiological nature of man can help us to understand better the characteristics of our beliefs which get us into so much difficulty

with one another? Most of my comments will be devoted to this question.

#### THE COMMON DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REPRESSION

The "white over black" phenomenon and slavery as a part of this can be viewed as examples of a large class of interactions in which some persons with more power and resources assign lower value to, and repress, some persons with less power and resources. This had happened under feudal and manor systems, under caste and class systems around the world, and also in virtually every institution, organization, and family the world over despite the noble efforts of some groups to develop democratic patterns with equality, justice, and mutual consideration for all.

Have all these interactions common roots? When we rid ourselves of a feudal system, are we apt to replace it with a similar repressive social pattern which aggrandizes one and demeans another, as much status, privilege, opportunity, reward, and power is developed for one and little for the other? Collective dissent, social movements, revolutions, and wars have dealt with this issue. In my own lifetime I have observed common dynamics in the interactions between men and women, rich and poor, management and labor, college administrators and students, whites and blacks, colonial powers and their colonies, and adults and children.

Could it be that there are common dynamics to be found wherever interactions take place between repressing forces and the repressed? Might this explain why white Juan Luis Vives in the 16th century and black Franz Fanon in the 20th century could discuss in parallel the dynamics of repression in men's minds and in their societies?

#### THE PROJECTION OF BODY IMAGE INTO ALL THAT HUMANS PERCEIVE AND CREATE PROMOTES RACISM AND PARANOIA

The neurophysiological storehouse containing impressions of all past behavior and experiences is employed to give meaning to all which is perceived or created by human beings. In the development of the body image the representations of body parts and body processes constitute the earliest impressions and provide a basis for relating to subsequent impressions. Representations of objects

occur in relation to and become fused with the body representations. The different value which becomes associated with different parts is also assigned to the object representations associated with each part respectively.

With minor exceptions due to unusual cultural variants, the same parts and processes are aggrandized and the same ones denigrated in societies throughout the world. Upper parts are aggrandized and lower ones denigrated. Free, unrestricted, and known parts are aggrandized while restricted, hidden and unknown parts are denigrated. The front is aggrandized and the behind denigrated, the near aggrandized and the distant denigrated. These values are projected into all perception and into all products, ideas, and social structure which men create. The heavens are always above and the hells are below, the upper parts of buildings are decorated while lower parts, i.e. basements, remain neglected and unadorned. Fronts are decorated while rears remain neglected. Upper aspects of social structure are accorded more worth, privilege, resources, and power while lower parts go neglected.

In societies where all parts of the body are well accepted, the clothing, social structure and culture tend to be simple. In societies where renunciation of some body parts and idealization of others occur, the clothing, social structure, and culture are more differentiated and complex. Differentiation starts with the body parts and processes. For social structure to loosen, clothing and bodies must loosen also.

The differential value associated with various body parts and processes which is projected into perception and into the creation of social structure is obviously related to the origins of racism. Certainly, we shall be unable to develop societies without racism so long as we continue to create societies in the image of our bodies. Moreover, it seems unlikely that we shall cease doing this until somehow we can become aware of this universal unconscious tendency.

#### THE DRIVE TO DICHOTOMIZE CONTRIBUTES TO RACISM AND PARANOIA

Because mental functions and behavior derive from and have anchorage and substance in body physiology, the dichotomous nature of body functions (especially the vegetative functions) introduces into mental functions what might be called

a drive to dichotomize

Since the dichotomy in physiology commonly involves paired opposing or antagonistic functions, it is not surprising that dichotomy exists in primitive mental life, with opposite attitudes reserved for each member of paired thoughts or feelings. Wherever there are male-female, front-back, open-closed, free-bound, right-wrong, in-out, right-left, north-south, near-far, new-old, high-low, white-black, or me and not me, one is accepted and one rejected in primitive mental life.

In effect, the dichotomization of the body into opposing functions leads to dichotomization and opposing patterns in the mind. An early life task involves defining the good and defining the bad in the body, in the mind, and in the world. This leads to a dichotomous search on the part of each person to find, free, promote and cherish the "good" (ideas, objects, feelings, persons) and to find, control, repress, and get rid of the "bad." This dichotomy finds expression in a search for objects of affectionate bonds and a search for objects of aggressive bonds. Thus, because of dichotomy in the body, there is manifest in mental functions and behavior a drive to dichotomize with the psychological mechanisms of introjection and affectionate bonds associated with one component and the psychological mechanisms of projection and aggressive bonds associated with the other. Each of these has distinctive physiological counterparts.

It may be observed commonly in relating to one person, that good and bad attributes may be imputed alternately to that person, in a relationship which is ambivalent and inconstant. When relating to two persons, good attributes may be attributed to one, and bad to the other, in the relationships which are constant and unambivalently affectionate with one and aggressive with the other. The same holds for relationships with groups.

The drive to dichotomize in opposing directions builds conflict into mental functions. Modifications take place in this under continuing development and maturation so that individuals vary greatly in their manner of relating to and dealing with the dichotomies of early life. Great complexity and individualization are possible. However, it is characteristic for groups to discourage individuality and to encourage and reinforce conformity among group members. To accomplish this the

primitive mechanisms are reinforced and paranoid mechanisms are ideal for this purpose. They supply a simple common basis for group formation and resolve primitive ambivalences by associating affectionate bonds and "good" with one's own while projecting evil and developing aggressive bonds toward outsiders.

#### THE PROJECTION OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS INTO SOCIAL STRUCTURE PROMOTES RACISM AND PARANOIA

In many ways parents may be thought of as enslaved by their young children since their behavior is, to a considerable degree, determined by the demands of the children for whom they work, prepare food, give care and nurture, and do all of the cleaning and other menial tasks without receiving monetary reward. In fact, the infantile wish to have omnipotent control over parental services can be seen to be projected into many forms of social structure and is especially clear in the slave culture and in the caste and class structures of some societies where services and menial work tend to be performed by one group on the demand of the other.

One derivative of the projection of parent-child relationships into social structure may be found in the myth of the expert. This myth establishes and preserves class distinctions by defining status, high rewards, and considerable power to all members of professional groups although many of them may have less expertise than many non-professionals. The voices which are heard are the ones that have the labels, i.e. diplomas, and other badges of distinction.

#### THE TWO DIVERGENT PROCESSES OF UNDER- STANDING ASSOCIATED WITH RACISM AND OTHER GROUP-RELATED PARANOIAS

We are far more primitive than we think. We understand some persons immediately by introjection if we perceive them as members of our own group. On the other hand, we understand others immediately by projection if we perceive them as outsiders. Thus, some persons we understand by taking them in or by taking in what they offer while we understand others by dumping upon them things we renounce within ourselves. Wherever a white person and a black person experience conflict in "white racist" structure, the white is

understood by introjection and is presumed to be right, while the black is understood by projection and is presumed to be wrong. Ghettos tend to be understood by projection while the rest of the city tends to be understood by identification.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In my commentary I have been explicit about labeling the paranoid process in racism, and have further defined this as a group-related non-pathological process used by all individuals who have emotional ties in groups. I have offered some speculations about psychological, physiological, and social processes which may contribute to the development of pro-white, anti-black paranoia and other group-related paranoias.

Dichotomy in physiological processes programs dichotomy, conflict, and ambivalence into psychological processes. Primitive paranoid patterns, by aggrandizing one side and denigrating the other, separate the paired components of dichotomous, conflicting, and ambivalent mental life so that one component may be accepted and the other rejected.

The paranoid patterns in an individual are reinforced and aligned with paranoid patterns in other individuals when a group is formed. The group-related paranoia of every group member may contain the same aggrandizing or denigrating false beliefs as a result of the projection of common elements from the body image of every member. Since group members understand one another by introjection, and understand outsiders by projection, the members of any group have affectionate bonds with aggrandizement for one another and aggressive bonds with denigration for outsiders.

Thus, each group member searches on one hand for objects of affection in other group members, and for objects of projection in outsiders. What is projected is always that which one renounces and which one unsuccessfully struggles to remove from oneself. In the struggle it is repressed from consciousness, but it repeatedly presses to re-enter conscious thinking and behavior.

When the repressed content can be associated with some outside person, it can re-enter consciousness bound tightly to image of the outsider,

and there seems to exist for the first time an opportunity to concretely control, repress, or rid oneself of the repressed by controlling, repressing, and getting rid of the outsider.

Despite our lack of knowledge about the nature and origins of racism and other group-related paranoias, we have developed many techniques for favorably changing them. However, attempts to modify them evokes so much resistance, conflict, and often violence, that better understanding of the nature of these processes will be necessary before resistance to change may be lowered. More understanding is also needed since we continue to cyclically reproduce new maladaptive forms as rapidly as our reforms and revolutions alter old ones.

We should remind ourselves also that even when more adequate understanding is available it will probably be rejected for the following reasons:

1. Paranoid mechanisms are unconscious and paranooids believe themselves to be right and appropriate in thinking and behavior. Since we are unable to perceive our own paranoia we must have it pointed out by outsiders, and we do not believe them, we only project on them.

2. Since we have traditionally reserved the term "paranoia" for paranooids with disturbed social relationships, we shall reject its use with persons whose social relations with their fellow group members are healthy.

3. We are so narcissistic and impressed with ourselves as reasonable persons, that we will not seriously consider how generally our mental faculties are employed in the service of our irrational and primitive motivations.

4. Our humane behavior in one-to-one relationships blinds us to the inhumanity we practice as members of groups.

5. Those of us who retain ties to our groups without sharing in the paranoia of other members practice a kind of hypocrisy by being "in but not of the group." Our reason will not permit acceptance of the false beliefs, but our emotional dependence upon ties to fellow group members will not permit us to oppose them.

When all things are considered, it becomes clear that group-related paranoias will continue with astronomical tolls in exploitation, neglect, deprivation, suffering, illness, violence, and death—unless some giant leap can be taken by mankind in the thinking and behavior processes group members employ with outsiders.